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STUDIES IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Much of the recent theorizing on the relation of Christianity to alien religions has been based on imperfect knowledge, and there was ample need for a work like that of Mr. Legge,¹ who has set himself not so much to propound conclusions as to collect and sift the available facts, and above all to bring his readers into contact with original documents. In many respects he is admirably qualified for his task. He has read widely and accurately over the whole field, and on Egyptian religion (which affords the key to many of the most difficult problems) can speak with the authority of an expert. He possesses in a high degree the faculty of detailed analysis, but has also an imagination and a sympathy which can seize the living element in bygone forms of faith. Not least, he is content to move cautiously and to refrain from idle conjecture when the path is hopelessly perplexed.

The two volumes correspond with the broad division of "forerunners" and "rivals," the religions which prepared the way for Christianity and those which competed with it for the allegiance of the Roman world. This division merges, however, in another and more scientific one: (a) oriental religions; (b) magical religions, as typified in the various phases of Gnosticism; (c) Manicheism, which aimed at sweeping into one vast synthesis the three prevailing religions of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. After a preliminary chapter on the conditions arising from the linking of East and West by Alexander's conquests, Mr. Legge discusses the cults which centered in the worship of Isis and Serapis. He reaches the conclusion that these cults affected Christianity not so much directly as through the heretical sects which borrowed from them, and he thus passes to an elaborate study of Gnosticism occupying a full half of his book. He regards Gnosticism as in its essence magical—an attempt not to propitiate the divine powers but to compel them by means of a secret knowledge. As the true precursors of the whole gnostic movement he deals with the Orphics, and with the Essenes, who were subject, he believes, to Orphic influence. The chapter devoted to this obscure sect is perhaps the least satisfactory in the book. It is only by a straining of our scanty evidence that the Essenes can be described as Gnostics, while their affinity with Orphicism is more than dubious. Mr. Legge now enters on his examination of Gnosticism proper in five of its typical forms—Simon Magus, the Ophites, Valen-

¹ *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity, Being Studies in Religious History from 330 B.C. to 330 A.D.* By F. Legge, F.S.A. 2 vols. Cambridge: University Press, 1915. lxiii+202, 423 pages. \$7.50.

tinus, the Coptic writings, and Marcion. He views the whole movement as "a stop-gap or temporary faith, which for 200 years acted as a halfway-house between heathenism and Christianity." The Ophites adopted the myths and beliefs which had sprung out of the cults, and correlated them in a more or less superficial manner with speculative and Christian ideas. Valentinus converted these Ophite conceptions into something like a real theology. His construction is essentially symbolical, shadowing forth in its system of aeons the process whereby the world and man are derived from God. The chapter on the Pistis Sophia is particularly notable. From his familiarity with Egyptian ideas, Mr. Legge is able to throw genuine light on this first-hand gnostic document, which has hitherto baffled all interpretation. But his judgment is surely at fault in assigning to an early date, and in all probability to Valentinus himself, a work that seems plainly to belong to the gnostic decadence. From Gnosticism Mr. Legge returns to religions that lay outside of Christianity. For his account of Mithraism he necessarily leans on Cumont, but at many points exercises an independent judgment. He makes it clear that the cult of Mithra was never, in spite of its wide diffusion, a dangerous competitor of Christianity. Its communities were small and exclusive, and resembled Free-Mason groups rather than worshipping congregations. Stress is laid also on the complaisance of Mithraism to other religions, which makes it probable that not a few of its analogies with Christian practice and belief were due to conscious borrowing. The chapter on the Manicheans is peculiarly interesting, since it incorporates a number of the documents recently discovered in Turkestan and China. These are now presented for the first time in accessible form, and enable us to interpret the Manichean teaching from direct sources.

The vast field covered by the work will be apparent from this brief survey of its contents, and it may seem ungrateful to complain that its scope was not extended further. But the chapter on the Alexandrian divinities might well have been supplemented by another on the Phrygian and Syrian cults, which only come in for incidental treatment. Some account of the Hermetic literature would also have been welcome, and would have raised a number of vital questions which are left untouched. We cannot but feel that the space devoted to Gnosticism, in spite of the value of the individual chapters, is out of proportion to the general scheme of the book. Gnosticism was no doubt related in the closest manner to the various Hellenistic cults, but it cannot be fairly regarded as an independent religion, competing with Christianity. Mr. Legge

himself emphasizes the fundamental Christian character of much of its teaching, and tends occasionally to exaggerate it. Is he warranted, for instance, in his view of Gnosticism as one of the main feeders of the church? On this point we prefer the testimony of the Fathers, who denounce the great heresy for stealing its recruits from the regular Christian army.

The book is chiefly valuable as a storehouse of facts and documents; and at the present stage of our knowledge this collecting of data is the best service that can be rendered to the study of the Hellenistic religions. Mr. Legge, however, is more than a compiler of sources. All his data are carefully sifted and arranged, and are furnished with illuminating commentary. Where the book falls short, to our mind, is in its handling of the larger problems to which the subject gives rise. Little attempt is made to determine the bearings of the alien religions on Christianity, or their connection with the general intellectual life of the age. Mr. Legge tells us that he has purposely excluded from his survey the philosophical systems, and a restriction of this kind was necessary for the purpose he had in view. But it is hardly possible to estimate the full significance of the mystery religions apart from the philosophical ideas with which they were interwoven. Their key must be sought in the later Stoicism as well as in primitive ritual and mythology.

A work so comprehensive easily lends itself to criticism, and specialists will take issue with the author on numberless points of detail. But they will be the first to recognize that he always writes with a full and accurate knowledge, and that in not a few cases he has let in the light where previously there was darkness. As a work of reference and suggestion his book will prove indispensable to all serious students of those religions whose importance for Christianity we are only beginning to realize.

The latest volume of the "American Lectures on the History of Religion" fully sustains the high standard we have learned to expect from this notable series.¹ Dr. Carpenter is not only a scholar of the first rank, but a writer of skill and distinction; and his book will appeal to a large circle of cultivated readers as well as to students of theology. The aim of the lectures is to trace the inner development of Christianity in the crucial period from 100 to 250 A.D., when the religion which had sprung up in the soil of Judaism was taking root in the larger gentile

¹ *Phases of Early Christianity*. By J. Estlin Carpenter, D.Litt. New York: Putnam, 1916. xvi+449 pages. \$2.00.

world. Dr. Carpenter conceives of our religion during this period as not yet committed to any uniform system. It was subject to influences of the most varied kind, and allowed room within itself for manifold types of doctrine and institution. About the middle of the third century this wide variety was felt to be dangerous, and the church was called on to decide whether it should be reduced to a rigid uniformity, or whether the principle of authority could be reconciled with freedom. Dr. Carpenter is concerned with the "phases" which manifested themselves during that period of free growth. Starting from the idea of salvation as the underlying motive of all early Christian thought, he devotes his six lectures to different aspects of this idea. He considers first the broad conception of Christianity as personal salvation; then the person and work of the Savior; then the church as the sphere and the sacraments as the means of salvation. The two concluding lectures deal with salvation by gnosis, and with the parting of the ways in the age of Origen and Cyprian. Under each of these main headings we have an examination of the various theories of salvation which were put forward from time to time in different sections of the church. The plan of the book is somewhat difficult to grasp, and not altogether happy. The author seems to be attempting to do two things at the same time: on the one hand, to distinguish the modes in which the Christian message was apprehended, and on the other, to present an ordered history of the early development. The effect is rather confusing, and at times misleading. Phenomena which marked the whole period in question (e.g., sacramental piety, gnosis) are so described as if they belonged to some given stage in the history. The sense of diversity which the author wishes to convey is half forgotten in that of continuous movement. But the scheme adopted has its own advantages. Instead of a series of more or less disconnected studies Dr. Carpenter is able to present a brilliant historical sketch of the whole progress of Christianity in one of its most vital periods. He traces the steps of its advance, and reviews different influences that acted on it from time to time. He finds room for admirable pictures of the great personalities—Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Origen, Cyprian—and makes us feel that the doctrinal development was the work of living men, struggling with real problems. The value of the book is due in no small measure to this insight into the permanent issues at the heart of ancient controversies and speculations; and the author is here assisted by his wide acquaintance with comparative religion. Again and again the ultimate drift of some early Christian idea is illuminated by parallels from Indian

or Persian or Egyptian thought, where the same problem is met in a similar way.

The book covers practically the whole field of Christian life and thought in two crowded centuries, and the fulness of treatment which we could often have desired is out of the question. For the same reason Dr. Carpenter is too often compelled to limit himself to the ideas immediately before him, without sufficient inquiry into their genesis. In most cases they grew out of modes of thought already present in the New Testament, but the process whereby they were modified or refashioned is only hinted at. Sometimes, too, there is a lack of definiteness, due to the need of passing rapidly from one stage of the development to another. For instance, the messianic salvation of primitive Christian belief is not clearly enough distinguished from the redemption which had its roots in Hellenistic dualism. Gnosis as a supernatural enlightenment is connected so closely with philosophical speculation that a casual reader will be likely to miss the essential difference. Shortcomings of this kind are inevitable in an attempt to compress a vast amount of material into a limited space, but they do not seriously affect the value of the book. It is safe to say that the history of the church in its formative period has never been presented more ably and attractively than in Dr. Carpenter's lectures. By the very fact that he looks at the development in its manifold "phases" he is saved from the one-sidedness that has marred much recent work. He recognizes that the movement which finally gave rise to the Catholic church was a highly complex one, and that all the factors must be taken into account before we can understand the result.

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HELLENIZATION OF CHRISTIANITY¹

The work of Glawe in his *Hellenisierung des Christentums* is not in the nature of an attempt to trace the manner in which Hellenic influences have affected the character of Christian theology during the time under consideration. His aim is rather to indicate the extent to which theological writers in those times have recognized the presence of Hellenism in the traditional Christian faith from the early times, or, more exactly, to

¹ *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums in der Geschichte der Theologie von Luther bis auf die Gegenwart.* By Walther Glawe. Berlin: Trowitzsch und Sohn, 1912. xii+340 pages. M. 10.